

SERVICES FOR THE BLIND IN  
KANSAS

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# Services for the Blind in Kansas

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IT IS OUR purpose here to examine the manner in which one state is offering services to its blind citizens within the framework of a public welfare program. An evaluation of this effort is not herein attempted and, certainly, the Kansas program is not presented as a detailed blueprint for meeting the problems of the visually handicapped in settings other than the one under consideration. It is hoped that, in a general way, the approach used in this state will serve to throw a bit more light on this important subject.

The Kansas Social Welfare Act of 1937 placed the state in conformity with the requirements of the Federal Social Security Act; created a state and county boards of social welfare; and authorized the State Board to establish a unit within its organization to carry on activities in the three general areas of:

1. Prevention of blindness
2. Restoration of eyesight, and the
3. Rehabilitation of blind individuals

## A MAIN DIVISION

UNDER THIS statutory authority the Division of Services for the Blind was organized on a very small scale in the fall of 1937 and has gradually grown until at present it is a fully operating "service" division of the State Department of Social Welfare, along with the Public Assistance and Child Welfare Divisions.

Prior to 1939, services for the blind were carried on with general state welfare funds not specifically designated for the purpose but the legislature of that year allotted \$75,000 from the over-all welfare appropriation for the use of the Division. The allotment was raised to \$100,000 in 1941 and has been retained at this level by successive legislatures until the present.

In Kansas, responsibility for the direct administration of material assistance and social welfare services is vested in the county boards of welfare in the one hundred five counties of the state who are, however, subject to supervision and regulation of the State Board. In the offering of services for the blind, the county departments of social welfare are regarded as local representatives of the Division of Services for the Blind. They are relied upon for help in case finding and active cooperation in the extending of

certain case services.

The agency feels quite fortunate in having legislative authority of a non-specific type which grants broad authorization to extend services as needed within the general areas outlined above. In the development of the program, primary attention was given to restoration of sight services and the prevention of blindness through medical care. As a result, a rather thorough going medical eye treatment program has evolved through which eye care is now extended to any state resident having a pathological eye condition amenable to treatment, who is without resources to secure the needed services.

## LOCAL DEPARTMENTS SERVE AS INTAKE

IN BRIEF, all referrals of treatment applicants come to the Division from the county departments of social welfare who serve as in-take points for the program. The referral information is of two types, medical and financial. The county office receiving the application refers the applicant to an ophthalmologist for a complete eye examination. A report is then forwarded to the State Supervising Ophthalmologist on the Division's staff for approval or disapproval of recommended care. Simultaneously, the county office submits to the Division a letter certifying that a review of the case has disclosed an absence of client resources with which to meet the cost of the recommended medical care.

All cases referred for medical service are reviewed also by the Medical Social Consultant on the staff who confers with the staff ophthalmologist on cases and offers suggestions to the local agencies regarding social services which will contribute to the welfare of the patient and his family and promote maximum benefit from the medical care.

Selected ophthalmologists, hospitals and optical companies throughout the state are utilized in offering services under the medical eye treatment program.

Many persons in need of eye care to improve or conserve eyesight come to the Division's attention through their applications for Aid to the Needy Blind since the required eye examination is reported to the Supervising Ophthalmologist for eligibility determination. Treatment needs thus brought to light are fre-



having the highest rate was forty times that in the state having the lowest rate of incidence. The highest rates for old age assistance and aid to dependent children were, respectively, only eleven times and nine times the lowest rates. The highest rate of incidence of the federally administered veterans unemployment allowances was sixteen times that in the state having the lowest rate.

The average general assistance payment in the state having the highest average was eight times the lowest state average. Both the highest old age assistance and the highest aid to dependent children averages were only four times the lowest. The highest average unemployment compensation benefit was only double the lowest. The federally administered veterans unemployment allowances of course averaged about the same in all states.

In a day when there is considerable talk of "one world" and very considerable effort to weld the states of this Union into one nation, the lack of anything like a national minimum standard of living below which no one in the country need fall, is an anomaly. In fact, just as we can hardly say—general-assistance-wise—that we are one nation, so can it hardly be said in certain of our states that they have attained the objective of "one state." This remissness of some of our states is not something which harms only those needy persons who are denied the basic necessities of life. Rather—if we can believe the President's Advisory Committee on Universal Military Training, his Committee on Civil Rights and his Council of Economic Advisers—it is the whole country, its economy, its security, its political institutions, its very international position that is placed in jeopardy by disregard of its human resources.

#### AND THE SOLUTION?

EXTENSION TO THE general assistance field of the benefits of state-federal cooperation could obviously be affected in any one of three ways: (1) abolition of the present categorical system in favor of a broad, single comprehensive program of public assistance to meet need arising from any cause whatever; (2) the establishment of more and more thinly sliced categorical programs until special provision is made for all conceivable groups and the so-called "residual" load reduced to such small proportions that state and local governments could easily manage its care; or (3) the extension of the present state-federal system to provide assistance to a "fourth category" which in fact would be so broad that it would really be no "category" at all. This third choice would of course assume a somewhat different standard of provision for the fourth

than for the other categories inasmuch as virtually similar care would be tantamount to the abolition of all categories. However, a new category such as one comprising needy handicapped and disabled persons established under the second alternative might be even more liberally provided for than any of the existing special groups.

The three state-federal special assistance programs which were at first characterized by many differences have during their 12 years' life time come increasingly to be administered in accordance with common principles and standards. Nevertheless it appears to many defenders of the present categorical system that *factors which at any one time permit the establishment of a special categorical program of high standards tend to permit the attainment of still higher standards when more general programs begin to catch up with the special program.*

On the other hand, *the existence of only a low-grade program of aid (such as the present state and local general assistance measures and—in their day the old general almshouse) tends to encourage development of special programs to provide higher standards of care for particular groups of needy persons, as for example for sick, handicapped or disabled persons within the larger whole.* Further, categorical programs in the present day and age would make more complex and wasteful an already unnecessarily complicated administrative and accounting structure necessitated by existing categorical programs.

#### NEED IS INDIVISIBLE

FURTHERMORE, CANNOT the American people today see—or cannot public welfare administrators help them to see—that need is indivisible? The need of the child of unemployed parents is as great as that of the child whose parents are incapacitated. The need of the man who has no job is as real as that of the man who has no hands. Still another consideration, tactical in nature, suggests that a special assistance category for handicapped and disabled persons might conceivably delay development of an already long-overdue program of national disability insurance.

Public opinion and political pressure groups being what they are at the moment, it would appear that the next immediate public assistance gain to be sought would be not the abolition of our present categorical programs or the establishment of a series of new categories but rather the establishment of a broad "fourth category" by providing for federal participation in general assistance on the same basis as it now participates in the state-federal special assistance pro-

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quently met under the state program in the same manner as those whose applications were specifically for medical service.

In addition to offering specific recommendations relating to social service needs in treatment case situations, the Medical Social Consultant devotes attention to stimulating case finding through the dissemination of information regarding eye conditions and ocular symptoms calling for attention. Such work is undertaken not only with county social work staffs but also with nurses, teachers, and health workers associated with state and local organizations. Much of her attention is devoted to the needs of partially seeing children and arranging for the meeting of their educational as well as medical and social requirements.

#### BROAD INTERPRETATION

THE TERM "rehabilitation services" is given a broad interpretation in the Kansas program for the blind and is construed to encompass not only those aids to economic and vocational adjustment but also any service, however minor, which may contribute to a blind individual's more adequate functioning in his home or community or merely bringing about a greater degree of self-satisfaction and happiness. It is immediately apparent that direct case services by the state staff cannot be offered on an adequate scale. This fact tends to emphasize the need for local agency participation in the extending of rehabilitation services.

The generally accepted definition of blindness<sup>1</sup> is used in Kansas to determine eligibility for rehabilitation services and recipients must reside in the state and have the intention of remaining therein.

To carry on and stimulate case finding by the county agencies and to accomplish case planning with local agency cooperation, the Division has set up a job classification known as Field Consultant for the Blind. Three such positions exist in the Division and these staff members are directly under the Case Supervisor. The Field Consultants all work out of the Headquarters Office but have geographical districts as their assigned responsibility.

The most effective and economical approach to field activity by the Consultant has proven to be the "county survey" approach. Under this plan a Consultant prepares in advance for a county survey by studying all case records in the Headquarters Office relating to cases in the county under consideration. Then the Field Consultant goes to the county to re-

main until all of the blind of the area have been seen either directly or indirectly (through a local worker) and a determination made as to problems needing attention and what services are indicated and by whom they are to be effected. The survey involves reading county office records, conferring with county social workers, home visiting, often with the county worker, community contacts, and arranging for publicity to acquaint blind residents of the area not known to the welfare office that the Division representative is present and available for conference.

On completion of a survey the county department of welfare is supplied with written evaluations and recommendations in every case felt to be in need of some service. These plans may call for services to be given directly by the Division such as vocational training, medical care, employment, braille or craft instruction, or a talking book machine. On the other hand, the service may be the proper responsibility of the county office coming in close and continued contact with the client in his home community.

#### A COMPLETE REPORT

IN ADDITION to the individual case evaluations and plans formulated during the survey, there is also drawn up an over-all survey report describing the extent and distribution of blindness in the county, the causes of blindness, characteristics of the blind population, nature of the individual problems and a statistical presentation of the apparent service needs. General recommendations are also presented to the local agency relating to services for the blind and a copy of the survey report is given to the Division of Public Assistance of the State Department of Social Welfare for the information and use of the Field Representatives of that Division.

It is important that the Field Consultant keep the local agency advised of all actions performed in the course of the survey and allow the county workers to observe the methods used so that their skills in dealing with problems relating to the blind may be strengthened. Staff conferences as well as individual conferences are held to inform the local social workers of resources available and techniques applicable in serving the blind. Periodic follow-up visits to counties surveyed are indicated to check on progress in case plans and recommended services and to contribute to the further development of the county staff.

A disproportionate amount of attention has been devoted to outlining the function of the Field Consultant but purposely so. This is a key or pivotal position in the Division organization on which much of the agency activity is hinged. The Field Consultant

<sup>1</sup>Visual acuity (Snellen) of 20/200 or less in the better eye, with correction, or a limitation in the visual fields so that the widest diameter of the visual field subtends an angle no greater than 20 degrees.



is the liaison person between the state and county departments of welfare, and the effectiveness of this relationship reflects in the quality and volume of service extended to the blind. Then too, the case finding function of the Consultant is an important one since no service can be extended until the client is identified. The traditional policy of social agencies of waiting until the client presents himself with his problem does not apply in work with the blind. For a variety of reasons, it is necessary for the service agency to seek out the blind and not only offer service but, in some instances, overcome a lethargic attitude fostered by years devoid of opportunity.

#### A CASE PLAN

**B**UT THE "diagnostic" function of the Field Consultant is the responsibility which, more than any one factor, make this staff member a most important link in the organization. It is the Field Consultant who says "this is the problem" and "this should be done about it." It is true that in arriving at such determinations various medical, psychological, psychiatric, and similar facilities may be utilized but the final responsibility rests with the Consultant for formulating the case plan which, upon completion, is then referred to the appropriate Division staff member or outside agency for service. Local public or private social agencies, health agencies, church groups, civic organizations, community leaders or other individuals may be logically in a position to provide the needed help. If the service needs seem to be within the ability of the Division to meet, the referral is made accordingly to the correct "resource" staff member within the Division.

It must be emphasized here that high on the list of information sources used by the Consultant in framing case plans are the other staff members of the Division. It is obviously indicated that the Consultant advise with the rest of the staff during the planning stage to make sure the plan is realistic and allow the staff person later to be responsible for culmination of the plan an opportunity to express himself and make his contribution.

Many case plans call for the services of a Home Teacher on the Division staff to offer instruction in braille, typing, Moon type, or script writing; crafts instruction to develop leisure time activities; domestic science coaching for practical home making use; or special case work services in selected cases presenting unusual problems. Three such teachers are on the staff at present assigned to geographical districts and also work under the direction of the Case Supervisor. The addition of one teacher is contemplated soon.

Pre-employment services for blind persons interested in and suitable for work are offered usually under the Field Consultant's supervision. Vocational counseling, testing and the like lead into the formulation of varied employment plans ranging from professional and business undertakings to sheltered workshop or home industry employment. However, when the vocational objective is arrived at and the case plan completed and approved by the Case Supervisor, it is referred to the Supervisor of Employment who in turn will assign the client to the appropriate member of his staff for supervision during the training period; placement on completion of training; and post-placement supervision.

#### SUPERVISOR OF EMPLOYMENT

**T**HE SUPERVISOR of Employment is responsible to the Director of Services for the Blind. He is on the same level of responsibility and authority as the Case Supervisor and directs a staff of employees with special assignments related to the types of employment in which the blind are placed. Two Placement Agents, assigned to geographical districts accept blind persons previously screened whose plans call for employment in competitive fields such as private industry, the professions, clerical jobs and rural employment. It is their responsibility to acquaint themselves with the progress of the case thus far by studying the case record and become personally acquainted with the applicant. Groundwork is previously laid with the applicant so that the transfer of workers on the case is made as smoothly as possible and the client knows that while he formerly looked to the Field Consultant for guidance, he now relies upon the Placement Agent to develop an employment opportunity for him.

It is the Placement Agent's job to make arrangements for any training called for in the plan, supervise the trainee and subsequently place him in suitable employment. Periodic contact is maintained with the worker and employer for the duration of the placement.

Clients whose case plans call for employment in small business enterprises are referred by the Case Supervisor to the Supervisor of Employment who directs such training and placement by one of two Managers of Business Enterprises. The two latter staff members are responsible for establishing and overseeing the day-by-day operation of enterprises such as vending stands, self-service laundries, home bakeries, service industries, which are a part of an agency controlled Business Enterprises Program.

Under the Business Enterprises Program, locations for projects are secured, equipment installed, and the

operator trained and placed under an agreement whereby he is privileged to manage the business indefinitely as long as he performs satisfactorily. He never owns the business, title to which is retained by the Division, primarily for the purpose of preserving the job opportunity for the blind. Individually owned businesses frequently change hands and the location might be sold to other than a handicapped person, thereby removing a much needed work opportunity.

#### SHELTERED EMPLOYMENT

INDIVIDUALS WHOSE case plans call for sheltered employment in an agency operated workshop or supervised home industries are ultimately referred to the Supervisor of Sheltered Employment whose duties resemble those of the Placement Agents and Business Enterprises Manager except that his area of training and placement is that of congregate and home workshop employment.

Under the sheltered employment program, blind workers who are not yet capable of going out into employment in competition with sighted workers are provided with work under controlled conditions generally of a manufacturing type. In Kansas, rugs, mops, door mats and similar products are made in addition to subcontract work which is done in the workshops for private manufacturers.

It will be seen, then, that the Case Supervisor and Supervisor of Employment working together can pull the two segments of the staff into a coordinated team to serve the blind vocationally. In addition to supervisory responsibility, the Supervisor of Employment is concerned with personally developing new areas of work through surveys, promotional activities, community contacts and by supplementing the efforts of his staff.

Routine services such as the distribution of talking book machines, arranging for transportation privileges on common carriers, general informational service and miscellaneous aids are extended directly from the Administrative Office of the Division.

Although space here does not permit a full description of a new phase of the Kansas program now being initiated, the Vocational Diagnostic and Preconditioning Center should be mentioned. A facility with a staff of three trained persons is being established at Topeka where classes of between four and eight blind trainees at a time are accepted for close study and orientation. Persons referred are those presenting problems from a guidance or adjustment standpoint and their employment plans are blocked as a result. Extensive testing, job sampling and tryouts, and

orientation services are offered in the classes which last about six weeks. Poise, independent mobility, grooming techniques and general social acceptability are promoted with the realization that the blind worker's chances of success are largely dependent upon his being able to adjust to people as well as the routine of his job.

#### GOOD RESULTS

RESULTS ARE encouraging and information in regard to clients gleaned in a few brief weeks of fully scheduled and varied class programs exceeds, in all probability, the amount of information that could be secured in as many years of intermittent field contacts.

The Division of Services for the Blind is a participating agency in the State-Federal Vocational Rehabilitation program under the direction of the Federal Office of Vocational Rehabilitation. State statutory direction being much more inclusive than that of the Federal legislation concerning Vocational Rehabilitation requires the Division to gear itself for the broader job of which Vocational Rehabilitation is a part. A separate rehabilitation unit was not set into the Division organization but a plan worked out for the assignment of time percentages of certain staff members to the Vocational Rehabilitation program, depending on the nature of their duties. For example, the Home Teachers, while not Vocational Rehabilitation employees, can be used as training or pre-employment conditioning resources on a case cost basis; the Field Consultants are fifty per cent Vocational Rehabilitation employees, and the Placement Agents one hundred per cent rehabilitation employees.

It is felt that, although not fully developed, a start has been made in Kansas in the establishment of a program to meet the needs of the blind in a relatively comprehensive way. Some progress has been made in several areas which space here has not allowed including (such as work with pre-school blind children, deaf-blind). We feel fortunate in being a part of the state agency which supervises the administration of Aid to the Needy Blind for although close coordination of assistance and service has not yet been achieved, the organizational paths are in existence for its development. Future plans include increased effort to integrate "services for the blind" into the local departments of welfare where it is felt the positive approach of preventive and rehabilitative services should have emphasis at least equal to that accorded the important, but often palliative, financial aid programs.



# State Correspondents Report . . .

## ALASKA

BECAUSE PARTS of the Territory are sparsely populated, the Department of Public Welfare uses 172 people in the outlying small towns and villages who serve as fee agents. These agents accept applications for the various types of public assistance, make annual reviews of active cases, and refer special problems to the district social workers.

The recent session of the Territorial Legislature took the following action concerning the aid to dependent children program: increased maximum grants to \$50 for the first child and \$25 for each additional child; eliminated the requirement of "suitability of the home;" and took no action on the Department's request to raise the age limit from 16 to 18 years. Maximum grants for old age assistance were increased from \$60 to \$80 per month.

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## NEW YORK

THE 1949 LEGISLATIVE session produced important measures in three fields of public welfare interest: child welfare, where an attack was made on abuses in child placement; social insurance, where a new program was established to meet the hazards of non-occupational illness and injury; and mental hygiene, where a State Mental Health Commission was created.

For three years, practices in placing children for adoption have been under scrutiny by the Special Committee on Social Welfare, a sub-committee of the Joint Legislative Committee on Interstate Cooperation. Four measures introduced by this Committee were enacted into law. One clarifies the definition of the term "place out" in the Social Welfare Law. It emphasizes that the term embraces the placing out of a child in the care of persons other than close relatives, for the purpose of adoption. Another bill requires that a new birth certificate be issued in every case of adoption.

A third bill strikes at the practice of buying and selling babies by prohibiting the payment or receipt of compensation for transferring custody of a child to persons other than close relatives or legal guardians. Payments to authorized agencies are permitted, however, for services they render in connection with the placing of children. The fourth measure is designed to cope with violations of the law prohibiting privately

operated unincorporated maternity homes from placing children.

## SICKNESS AND DISABILITY INSURANCE

THE MAILER-CONDON Act brings to the working men and women of the State the benefits of social insurance against the hazards of sickness and disability not incurred in the course of their employment. Benefits will be payable not only to those who are employed at the time they suffer disability, but also to the unemployed. Consequently, this legislation will fill a serious gap in the present unemployment insurance program under which persons who become ill or disabled while unemployed have their benefits suspended because they are not available for work.

Workers will receive compensation for disabilities occurring on and after July 1, 1950. Benefits of 50 per cent of wages are payable for 13 weeks in any year. The maximum weekly benefit is \$26 and the minimum \$10, except that if the average weekly wage of an individual is less than \$10, the benefit shall be the amount of the average weekly wage. There is a non-benefit waiting period of seven days.

Beginning July 1, 1950, an employee contributes one-half of 1 per cent of wages, but not more than 3 cents per week. Employers pay all the cost in excess of the employee contribution. It is not anticipated that this will run much above one-half of 1 per cent. Employers subject to the act are those employing four or more workers with certain exceptions, such as religious, charitable and educational institutions and farmers. Employers of less than four employees and those exempted under the Act may elect to cover their employees voluntarily.

Employers must provide for disability benefits for their employees either by approved self-insurance, the purchase of insurance from private carriers, or from the state insurance fund, or by an approved welfare plan. The Workmen's Compensation Board will administer the new system of non-occupational disability benefits. New York is unique among the states with disability insurance plans in providing for administration through the agency administering workmen's compensation rather than the unemployment insurance agency.

## NEW MENTAL HEALTH COMMISSION

THE STATUTE creating the Mental Health Commission declares the purpose to be "to bring about



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